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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on efforts by library groups and individuals to influence the development of state government information policy in various states in the United States, and emphasizes the need for librarians to make sure they either initiate such development or insert themselves into any existing policy development processes. Emphasis is given to accessibility for all, including those with disabilities that may prevent them from reading conventional print. Included at the end of the paper are links to websites that may be of interest to those involved in such policy development and a copy of a policy statement concerning government information locator services. (Author/AEF)

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Library involvement in state government information policy development in the United States

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on efforts by library groups and individuals to influence the development of state government information policy in various states in the United States, and emphasizes the need for librarians to make sure they either initiate such development or insert themselves into any existing policy development processes. Emphasis is given to accessibility for all, including those with disabilities that may prevent them from reading conventional print. Included are links to websites that may be of interest to those involved in such policy development.

Overview

Much has been written and debated for many years concerning government information policy development and oversight. Certainly since September 11 there has been increased attention paid at both the federal and state levels on the often conflicting needs of information access versus information security. Of major importance has been passage of the "USA Patriot Act", which increased dramatically the role of government oversight and management of information access. The Act has caused many librarians to express concern about possible diminution of access to government information. For details on issues relating to the USA Patriot Act, see the American Library Association website cited in Attachment A.

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In the past, at both the federal level and in many of the states, there have been many policies – both written and unwritten – often available only to the agency that developed them and the clients who have tried to obtain information from that agency. More recently, due to the ubiquity of the Internet, policy statements often appear on the government websites, and the federal government is making tremendous efforts to present the various policy statements in a comprehensive fashion. At the same time, issues concerning national policy in the areas of telecommunication, copyright, and uniform codes for transmission of information via the Internet have become topics of increasing public debate. The following is a quote from the United States strategic technology policy which appears at http://www.gils.net/intro.html:

"Every year, the Federal Government spends billions of dollars collecting and processing information (e.g., economic data, environmental data, and technical information). Unfortunately, while much of this information is very valuable, many potential users either do not know that it exists or do not know how to access it. We are committed to using new computer and networking technology to make this information more accessible to the taxpayers who paid for it."

Attached to this paper are a few of the many federal and state government websites that readers may want to refer to in developing a strategy for information policy development in their own governmental area. (See Attachment A)

Historical Role of Libraries

Libraries and librarians have been leaders in developing information policy throughout the United States and particularly in the individual states. The American Library Association has been key in recommending governmental information policies, as well as serving as a watchdog group over potential threats to information access.

We are very proud of the fact that the current Superintendent of Documents, who oversees the distribution of federal documents throughout a system of depository libraries is a practicing librarian. In fact, the Depository Library Council in the early 1980's required each depository library to develop and submit to the Superintendent of Documents a comprehensive plan that included the range of documents it would collect, its policies on availability and distribution methods, its goals for increasing access, and the like.

Focus of This Paper

This paper will focus on the history of information policy development by state library agencies, and will offer in some detail the experience of one state: the state of Rhode Island, where for more than ten years I filled the position of State Librarian, and for the last five years was also the state's Chief Information Officer.

In the 1980's there was a growing realization among state librarians that it was essential to develop a coherent information policy for state governments in addition to what was being done at the federal level. At that time there was no overall federal government information policy, though there were many agency policy statements, as well as policies

relating to Depository Libraries throughout the country. The overall policy statements for this system are available at http://www.gpo.gov/su_docs/

In 1987 the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies put together a national conference to investigate how best to formulate state government information policies and what entities

should be involved in that formulation. The conference was by invitation only, to representatives from each state who had responsibility for generating, distributing, maintaining, or archiving government documents. Each state was invited to send up to five representatives from the State Library, State

Archives and/or Records Management Units, as well as other persons who might have interest or responsibility for any aspect of government documents, including academic and corporate individuals who were experts in various aspects of information resource management.

The conference attracted 140 people from nearly all 50 states. The proceedings from the conference were published [1] through the Council of State Governments and are available on loan from the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives. The proceedings also include papers on the process used in several states to formulate their policies. One paper specified 16 principles that should be addressed in developing any government information policy. Although these principles were developed before the Internet became a basic source of information, they remain valid. More recently, the American Library Association's Office of Information Technology Policy convened a group of librarians to update a statement of principles that had been developed in 1994. The resulting statement – "Draft Principles for the Networked World" - includes statements concerning the role of libraries in development policies on intellectual freedom, privacy, intellectual property, infrastructure, equitable access, and content. Although the statement is too long to include in this paper, it is an important document that should be read by all librarians. The full text is available at http://www.ala.org/oitp/

Results from the 1987 conference were significant. The most common result was that many state representatives recognized that they had many similar concerns, and that they needed to work together within their own states to develop coherent policies for their states. Several states – most notably Kentucky – did work out a process by which legislation was adopted, an oversight board was established, and issued relating to state information policy were identified and worked on. Kentucky's current information policy statements are included on their state website and as part of their new portal www.kydirect.net.

In the 1980's, many of the agencies had developed information policy statements relating to their own particular areas, but there had not been any consistent effort to make sure that these policies were compatible. For example, the records management people had developed records retention schedules for documents generated by government agencies, and the archives people had developed policies with respect to the types of materials and formats that should be kept in perpetuity. These groups had worked together for a long time, and were consistent in their approaches; however, the growing use of electronic media for information generation had caused them to begin to review their policies to determine how well they fit the new formats. At the same time, the information technology units in state government were generally much more concerned with information security than information access, and at the time were almost universally of the opinion that policies relating to information generation or retention were the responsibility of others.

My Efforts

At that time I was State Librarian in the state of New Jersey, and I tried to have legislation introduced that would permit an overall approach to information policy. This would have been particularly opportune, since the State Library was a part of the Department of Education, which also included the State Archives and Records Management Program, the State Historical Commission, and the State Museum. We did work together informally, but I was unsuccessful in developing anything more formal.

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1. Gateways to Comprehensive State Information Policy, James A. Nelson, Editor, Lexington, KY, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies through the Council of State Governments, 1987.

From New Jersey, I moved to Rhode Island as the Director of the Department of State Library Services. I remind you that the Internet was not available to most of us at that time, and that electronic communication and documents in electronic formats were just beginning (at least in Rhode Island) to become common. At that time, the library system in Rhode Island was the only comprehensive statewide governmental network that allowed communication and transmission of information electronically throughout the state.

Rhode Island Activities

In 1995, I proposed that the state establish the position of Chief Information Officer with responsibility for both library services and information technology. As part of this effort, I also proposed that the state establish an Information Resources Management Board (IRMB), with oversight responsibility for developing a statewide information policy. The language of the proposed law was similar to that implemented in Kentucky nearly ten years previously. The Governor and the General Assembly approved the concept and both the IRMB and the CIO position were authorized in the 1996 session. The language of the current law appears on the IRMB website http://www.irmb.state.ri.us. The original language specified that the CIO must have a graduate degree from an accredited school of library science. This requirement is common in university settings, where the responsibility for library services and information is often joined under one administrative head. In state government, however, this was the first time this combination of administrative functions occurred, and the requirement for a library degree was included. Unfortunately, the educational requirement was dropped as part of a budget review process a couple of years ago, and it may never be restored.

Because I had been influential in developing the idea of the IRMB and the CIO, I was asked to take on the CIO position, and to be the initial chair of the IRMB. The makeup of the IRMB included state government employees from both the Executive and Legislative Branches (the Judiciary was not included, though in recent years there has been consideration of adding them), local government officials, users of information technology, and representatives of both elementary and secondary education, and the higher education establishment. Note that the name of the IRMB included the term "information resources management", not just information technology management. This was deliberate, though it continued to be difficult to make sure that all concerned – both the IRMB members and others in state government – understood the difference.

The IRMB early on developed a website to display information about its operations. Its first task was to develop a five-year plan for coordinating the information technology system in the Executive Branch of state government. The current version of that five-year plan together with yearly statements of accomplishments and issues appears on the IRMB website.

I should mention also that I was fortunate that I was able to assign a person who had been the head of library development in the former Department of State Library Services to be in charge of the Information Technology Unit within my administration, so it was possible to inculcate the principles of universal access to information into the Information Technology staff.

Accessibility Policy

Several policy statement have been developed and adopted by the IRMB, of particular interest being one concerning accessibility of state websites by people with disabilities. This area is a contentious one in the United States, with such organizations as the National Federation for the Blind and the World Wide Web Consortium (http://www.W3C.org) mounting national and international efforts to assure that people with disabilities have equivalent access to electronic information. Rhode Island has adopted a policy statement that requires each state government website to be handicapped accessible ("Bobby compliant") (see policy statements on IRMB website cited above). All state websites have been checked and either found compliant or working on steps to become compliant. Each Bobby-compliant state website contains

the Bobby logo (see the IRMB website for an example of the Bobby logo). State library agency staff also convene webmasters from many state agencies to conduct continuing education sessions, to share information on issues, and to assure continuing compliance with accessibility policies.

Cooperative Efforts Among National Organizations

During the past few years, there has been a growing amount of cooperation and coordination among the national organizations responsible for library services (COSLA- Chief Officers of State Library Agencies), information technology (NASCIO – National Association of State Chief Information Officers), records management (NAGARA – National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators). In fact, the three organizations in 1999-2000 issued a joint statement endorsed by each of their executive boards, affirming their support for a coordinated approach to what has been called a "government information locator service". The joint statement is attached to this paper (See Attachment C). A government information locator service is a portal for government information whereby the person searching need not know the intricacies of the government bureaucracy, but through a system of metatags can get the name and other information about a given document merely by putting in a few keywords. In Rhode Island, this locator service is called "Find-It! Rhode Island" (http://www.find-it.state.ri.us), and is the result of more than 25 state agencies agreeing to metatag all their new documents for easy access. Again, each Rhode Island state government web page has the "Find-It! Rhode Island" logo on it so that users can click immediately to it if they need access to a document.

Process in Rhode Island:

The state library agency (Department of State Library Services- DSLS) was the originator and advocate for a statewide information policy. The first step was to introduce a legislative mandate. We were fortunate that we had the Kentucky law as a model. We were also fortunate that the General Assembly (the state legislature) was accustomed to having new advisory boards and commissions established and that they were beginning to recognize the need for some update of the information technology available through the state. Also fortunately, DSLS already had a positive reputation with the legislators for moving forward with electronic information, since DSLS had been influential in establishing the statewide electronic library network to which public libraries in each municipality were connected.

The proposal was passed into law during the 1996 legislative session. Once the law was established, we established several ongoing and adhoc committees to work on such items as the five-year plan for information resources management, priority issues relating to policy development, and a staff "working group" to look at issues relating to internal capability to do the necessary work. Another internal group is the Webmakers, which consists of volunteers from the various departments in all branches of state government. This group meets regularly to share tips on how best to present information on the departmental websites, as well as problems individuals have encountered on which they need assistance. This group was influential in developing the accessibility policy adopted by the IRMB, and in making sure that all state agencies were compliant.

What we did not do adequately was publicize what the CIO and the IRMB wanted to accomplish, and get "buy-in" from several of the essential players, particularly those who controlled the funding of information resources. However, we have been able to establish overall statewide information resource management policies, and standards for technology equipment acquisition and use by state government. Access to state government information has increased enormously without compromising internal security.

Recommendations:

Regardless of what agency has or has taken on responsibility for developing an overall government information policy in a specific agency or government, I strongly urge that librarians push their way into the process. If nobody has taken on this responsibility, the librarian should. Keep pushing. In the United

States it is often the information technology people who begin the process. Although NASCIO has recently switched its allegiance to information access rather than exclusively to information security, there are still many workers in the field who believe the old mantra that "information is power", but meaning that "If I have the information, I have the power", and if I give you the information, you will take the power away from me. Many people also still are convinced that information is a zero-sum game; that is, that if I give you information that I have, I will no longer have it. It is important to keep pushing the idea that sharing information is a win-win situation whereby everybody benefits.

I also recommend that you get as many powerful allies as possible before initiating any major effort. In most states, the Governor is the most important ally that one can have. In the United States the trend in recent years has been for the Chief Information Officer to be attached to the Governor's office for policy development. In Rhode Island, the CIO/State Librarian was a senior executive in the Department of Administration, responsible for information resource management in all Executive Branch departments and agencies. I was also fortunate that I was able to persuade the Governor to appoint me to his Cabinet so that I could regularly attend his Cabinet meetings. This was most helpful in both my ability to provide information to him, and in my visibility to other Cabinet members, who included the directors of major departments as well as members of the Governor's staff.

Whether or not there is an official CIO in your governmental entity, you should become involved in all discussions on information policy, whether they are initiated by you, by the information technology specialist, the archivist, the records manager, or any other entity. This often means stealthily finding out who is discussing policy issues, and inviting yourself to attend their meetings. It is much easier to be the person initiating the meetings, as then you can direct the subject matter, but if you can't be the issue generator, you must be seen as an essential part of the discussions.

I was also fortunate that, as CIO for the state, I was an official member of NASCIO, and was able to schedule a session at their annual conference on cooperative activities in several states between the state library and the information technology operations. This session turned out to be one of the most popular during that conference, and would not have occurred without a librarian suggesting it.

An important part of becoming involved is to make sure that other players recognize the librarian's expertise in organizing information and putting it together in a form that is easy for the user to find and comprehend. Many governmental entities in the United States are committed to the idea of a "portal", but without the kind of analysis and understanding that librarians have always been expert at, these portals can be just as incomprehensible as government information has always seemed to lay people.

So my strongest recommendations is, as the National Organization for Women used to urge its members,

BE THERE!

This is the most important recommendation that I can make. Be sure that you are notified of every meeting that discusses information policy, and get to be known as the information policy advocate. To the extent possible, try to be the originator of those meetings. That way you will assure that you are involved and have a leadership role in your government's information policy development.
Finally, I would like to quote from the poet T. S. Eliot, in his poem *Choruses from "The Rock"*:

> "...Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge/
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information..." [2]

Librarians are the advocates for maintaining the path to wisdom through knowledge and information.

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2. Eliot, Thomas Stearns, The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950, p. 96; Harcourt 1952.

ATTACHMENT "A" - Websites with Links to Government Information Policy

Federal

http://www.firstgov.gov
Portal for access to federal and some state government information

http://www.gpo.gov/su_docs/
Policy and other information relating to federal depository libraries

http://www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/
Includes links for federal accessibility policy, membership of the federal CIO Council, and many information technology policy documents

Other National

http://www.ala.org/washoff/patriot.html
Contains detailed information about the USA Patriot Act and issues relating to information access as a result

http://www.ala.org/oitp
Includes draft principles concerning libraries' role in information policy development as well as much other valuable information

http://www.w3c.org/WAI/
Contains information relating to accessibility issues. WAI stands for Web Accessibility Initiative.

http://www.arl.org/info/frn/gov/govtoc.html
The Association of Research Libraries' website includes up-to-date information on issues relating to access to government information following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

http://www.cosla.org
Contains information about the 50 state library agencies in the US.

http://www.nascio.org/aboutNascio/profiles
Contains links to state websites, many of which include state information policy statements

http://www.nagara.org/publications.html
Lists publications of NAGARA, many of which include policy statements relating to government records

State of Rhode Island

http://www.RI.gov
Portal for state government information and interactive online government transactions

http://www.irmb.state.ri.us/policies.htm
Official website for the Information Resource Management Board policies

http://www.info.state.ri.us/minimumstandards.htm
Contains Minimum Standards for Rhode Island Websites to assure accessibility for the largest possible audience

http://www.find-it.state.ri.us
Portal for published state government information

State of Kentucky

http://www.kydirect.net
State portal for access to interactive services and information

http://www.kdla.state.ky.us/links/govtech.htm
Links to sources of information and policies relating to information technology in Kentucky and elsewhere

ATTACHMENT "B" - Policy Statement Concerning Government Information Locator Services

ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT INFORMATION THROUGH GOVERNMENT INFORMATION LOCATOR SERVICES

As technology continues to leverage human effort in new, exciting, and productive ways, citizens increasingly look to their governments for additional information, services, and assistance in accessing government information. This complex set of services requires expertise in the structure and nature of information, hardware and software applications, and the dynamics of public service. Access to government information is most effective when government officials with these specialties join forces. In recognition of this desired collaboration, the membership of Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), National Association of State Information Resources Executives (NASIRE), and National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) formally express their desire to collaborate in ways that make best use of their talents and skills, to insure broad and effective electronic access to government information.

As part of achieving this goal, we jointly recognize that:

1. Public electronic access to government information is a priority to which governments must commit. Government agencies must cooperatively pursue opportunities to increase and enhance public electronic access to information. Government information locator services are an effective approach to connecting people with their governments. For such an effort to succeed requires standards in content description, hardware and software, and the life cycle of information. The most successful programs proceed when professionals in those areas work closely together to deploy a superior product.

2. Successful access requires the application of the specialized and complementary disciplines and skills of library science (content management), technology (equipment and software management), and archives and records management (information life cycle). Partnerships among these disciplines are vital.

   - State library agencies have a role in assisting agencies to publish, inventory, and index public information. They lead in the dissemination of government information through indexing, abstracting, and research services and training the public in the use of technology. Their expertise in direct public service is critical in the design of projects, services, and software applications.
   - Central information technology agencies have a role in determining or designing the hardware and software applications that most effectively connect citizens with information. They exert leadership in determining software and hardware standards and in helping train agency personnel in the application of technology to agency operations and services.
   - Archives and records management agencies have a role in managing government information through its life cycle. They lead in setting information management standards, assisting agencies in information management, and training agency personnel in information management.

Given the principles above, we jointly conclude that:

1. States should pursue government information locator services within a fully collaborative partnership among state library agencies, information resource agencies, and state archives/records management agencies.

2. State librarians, chief information officers, and archivists should work together to develop indexing standards and controlled vocabularies. Such efforts will maximize interoperability among government information locator services systems and enhance wider discovery of information by citizens.

--Adopted by COSLA — October 1999
--Adopted by NASIRE — January 2000
--Adopted by NAGARA — January 2000

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